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Research Article

Trends in Doctoral Research on English Language Teaching in Turkey

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Abstract

This review examines the doctoral research in Turkey completed between 2010 and 2014 in the area of English language teaching and learning. All of the dissertations (N = 137) indexed in the National Theses Database have been included in order to analyze dissertations' subject areas, research paradigms/techniques, and research contexts as well as scopes, validity/reliability concerns, and piloting. The subject area categorization is based on a cyclical reading process resulting in three major categories: Teaching English as a foreign language, foreign language teacher education, and second language acquisition. Grant/funding opportunities, the rate of international students, and certain demographic characteristics of PhD students are also addressed in order to clarify the contextual factors. In addition, detailed sub-subject areas were identified so as to be able to categorize all of the dissertations, and 57 dissertations representing the major subject areas are reviewed briefly to offer a closer look. The examination of the doctoral research reveals, in general, 12 potential problems, divided into two levels –6 macro levels (*systemic*) and 6 micro (*departmental*). Macro level problems include the heavy pressure of rapid graduation and international publishing. The present study is expected to provide a holistic portrait of the doctoral dissertations for the programs, supervisors, and students concerned.

Keywords

Doctoral education • Academic development • Doctoral practices • English Language Teaching • Role of higher education

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This review examines the doctoral research on English language teaching (ELT) between the years 2010 and 2014 in Turkey. The analysis focused on 137 PhD dissertations covering various aspects of English language learning and teaching, such as teaching English as a foreign language, foreign language teacher education, and second language acquisition (SLA). Of particular importance were the subject areas, research design, sampling methodology, and contexts with a special regard to adopted research paradigms of the dissertations analyzed. Including all of the dissertations completed in the last five years, the review also categorizes the dissertations in terms of those three major subject areas and sub-areas identified in a data-driven process.

A comprehensive overview of research on applied linguistics and foreign language education in Turkey was published by [Alptekin and Tatar \(2011\)](#), surveying approximately 130 published articles, conference presentations and PhD dissertations from 2005 to 2009. [Alptekin and Tatar \(2011\)](#) also discuss in detail the history and sociopolitical dynamics of foreign language education in Turkey. Hence, the present review does not repeat those recollections, which are still valid under today's conditions. Instead, the focus is on research trends and concerns of the doctoral research written between 2010 and 2014.

Over the last two decades, ELT PhD programs and scholars in Turkey have undergone a radical transformation process, during which the field has moved from a practice-based orientation to a research-based one ([Uysal, 2014b](#)). This transformation process was triggered mostly by the changing policies of Council of Higher Education in the late 1990s, when applying for associate professorship examination for ELT required a compulsory publication in certain scientific indexes. Those were initially the "Social Sciences Citation Index" and "Arts and Humanities Index." Later on in the mid-2000s, the Council began to accept research articles indexed the Australian Education Index, British Education Index, Education Index and ERIC as meeting the compulsory research article criterion. Therefore, doctoral students and assistant professors of ELT programs focused on publishing articles in the journals covered in those indexes. Surely, one of the effects of this transformation process is evident in graduate programs, PhD students, and dissertations.

Another reason for the transformation in ELT academia was the need for English teachers at all levels of education in Turkey. Foreign language has been synonymous with English in Turkey for more than half a century. Considering that Turkey is a pure expanding circle context in which English is used only in certain professional domains, it is hard to teach and learn it. Thus, the demand for learning English and English teachers has always been incessant in the country. The need for English teachers does not come only from state or private primary and secondary schools alone. In 1995, the number of both state and foundation universities in Turkey was

56. However, it is now 196, meaning that the number of universities in the country has almost quadrupled over the last two decades. Considering that English is taught in English preparatory programs of some faculties and in undergraduate programs as a compulsory subject, those universities are constantly in acute need for competent English instructors. This persistent demand for English teachers has naturally created a pressure on ELT programs, specifically at graduate levels. Newly established ELT programs constantly seek PhD holders to employ so that they can receive and educate English teachers. Within this academic climate, it is not surprising that graduate programs receive a huge amount of PhD applicants and that PhD students work under constant pressure exerted by their future institutions. In addition to those volunteer applicants, the Council of Higher Education employs research assistants in its ‘Academician Training Program’ (Council of Higher Education, 2015), assigning those doctoral candidates to graduate programs. Owing to the fact that only 14 graduate schools, with one beginning to accept students in fall of 2014, were accredited to run a PhD degree program in ELT between 2010 and 2014, the task is not an easy one for those institutions.

The need for an investigation of doctoral dissertations and programs is thus quite evident, as there is not yet a study analyzing those issues. However, the current studies on publication practices of Turkish scholars of applied linguistics (e.g. Alptekin & Tatar, 2011; Uysal, 2014b) indicate the need for developing an established body of literature to strengthen the scholarly quality and impact of Turkish research studies. Within this context, the present review aims to reveal how the doctoral research trends in Turkey are shaped in line with the above-mentioned social and institutional influences.

Methods

Research Design

The present study is largely based on a meta-synthesis methodology (Bair, 1999; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) in which the core of the research design largely depends on an integrative and expansionistic approach to data analysis on the grounds that “...it compares and analyzes many studies together in a constructivist way, allowing interpretive themes to emerge from the synthesis” (Bair, 1999, p. 3). A typical meta-synthesis design integrates data from both qualitative and quantitative research studies. This research approach is interpretive in nature, as Bair (1999) holds, developed for the review of a large body of literature and in this particular study, doctoral dissertations, while at the same time synthesizing the findings in order to offer an in-depth perspective of a specific area of inquiry. In the present study, the major themes, addressed as *the subject areas*, were refined by categorizing the dissertations under certain themes in a

meta-synthesis process. The cross readings and discussions of the authors yielded three broad themes to categorize the dissertations into subject areas as well as detailed sub-areas. However, the research design also includes the quantification of the particular data driven from the dissertations to address various variables, such as subject area and research paradigm distributions. Lastly, an analysis of the data resulted in two major themes, macro and micro level problems, under which common and specific problems among the doctoral programs were categorized to offer a broader portrait. Macro level problems were designed to address those issues that are not only pervasive, but also common among all of the doctoral programs. Micro level problems may be evidently observed in one or more doctoral programs, but not be common to all.

Scope and Procedures

The data were drawn from two major sources. One source was the doctoral dissertations downloaded from the national online database provided by the Council of Higher Education. All of the dissertations completed in Turkish universities are indexed in the database of the Council of Higher Education, the National Theses Database, an open access online directory. The second source was the personal contact: Few dissertations were taken from their authors. According to the records of the national theses database, the total number of dissertations on English language teaching between 2010 and 2014 is 139. However, it is possible that one or two dissertations completed in 2014 have yet to be uploaded to the database as of mid-2015. In addition, not all dissertations can be fully accessible in the database because articles' authors have the right to restrict others from accessing them up to three years. Via personal networking, 3 dissertations which were not available in the database were procured directly from their authors. Furthermore, although full access to 29 dissertations in the national theses database were restricted by the authors, the available abstracts of most of them were adequate for analysis and were thus included in data collection. Also, 2 dissertations written on ELT doctoral programs were excluded from the data analysis because they had not actually focused on an issue able to be categorized under any ELT sub-field. Therefore, the review focused on 137 dissertations and excluded 2 dissertations.

Due to this study's descriptive nature, deciding on how to describe the dissertations presented a genuine challenge to the researchers. Among the plethora of data gathered on the dissertations, we attempted to provide an objective picture of the research trends, current concerns, and practices in doctoral studies on ELT in Turkey. As the first attempt to enlighten this uncharted territory for inquiry, the review does not offer any correlational comparisons or overly specific categorizations, which would be too ambitious within the limits of a paper. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency and percentage were utilized to analyze the data. Doctoral dissertations on ELT (N = 137) written between 2010 and 2014 in Turkish universities were analyzed in terms of:

1. Subject areas within ELT
2. Research paradigms
3. Research contexts
4. Sampling methods

In order to provide a bigger picture for Turkey's position in terms of ELT PhD programs, the geographical locations of universities, the number of faculty members in each university's doctoral program, and the number of the dissertations completed between 2010 and 2014 are provided in Table 1 below. The year that each university was founded was retrieved from universities' official internet pages. The number of faculty members in each doctoral program and the dissertations completed are representative for the years 2010 to 2014.

Universities	Year of Foundation	City	Number of Faculty Members in the Program	Number of Dissertations
Anadolu	1958/1982	Eskişehir	14	10
Ankara	1946	Ankara	8	9
Atatürk	1954	Erzurum	6	9
Boğaziçi	1863/1971	İstanbul	9	3
Çağ	1997	Mersin	4	-
Çanakkale 18 Mart	1992	Çanakkale	8	3
Çukurova	1973	Adana	16	14
Dokuz Eylül	1982	İzmir	8	6
Gazi	1926	Ankara	16	28
Hacettepe	1957/1967	Ankara	10	8
İstanbul	1773/1944	İstanbul	8	15
Mersin*	1992	Mersin	-	4
METU	1956	Ankara	18	18
Yeditepe	1996	İstanbul	5	3

* Mersin university ELT program invites 3 professors from the linguistics program of the university.

Results

General Aspects of the Dissertations and the Programs

The language choice in dissertations is that most of the ELT graduate programs produce dissertations in English. Exceptions to this are Istanbul and Ankara universities. Istanbul University produces dissertations in both Turkish and English. A foreign language teaching program in the linguistics department at Ankara University also supervises for ELT dissertations written only in Turkish. The total number of ELT dissertations written in Turkish was 25 (17.9%) between 2010 and 2014, and 114

(82.1%) in English. Among the 25 dissertations written in Turkish, 13 were supervised by academicians who had no background in ELT or in any other neighboring areas, such as linguistics, literature, or applied linguistics. What is more, 9 of those 13 dissertations come from 5 universities that do not have a PhD program in ELT or in a similar area.

Certain demographic characteristics, such as gender distribution, the nationality of PhD students, supervisors' academic rank, and funding of doctoral research were analyzed in order to fully portray the contextual factors. To begin with, 71 (51%) of the PhD students were female and 68 (49%) were male. The nationalities of the PhD students are not diverse: 128 (92%) were Turkish and 11 (8%) were international students. Eight (72.7%) of the international students were from Middle Eastern countries, 2 from Russia, and 1 from the USA. The university distribution of the international PhD students is that 3 graduated from Ataturk University (Erzurum), 3 from Gazi University (Ankara), 3 from Middle East Technical University (Ankara), and 2 from Hacettepe University (Ankara). Thus, 10 PhD programs had not received any international students over the five years preceding the publication of this study. The rank of the supervisors included full professors ($f = 86$, 62%), associate professors ($f = 22$, 16%), to assistant professors ($f = 31$, 22%). Regarding the funding for doctoral research, very few dissertations were supported by internal or external bodies. Table 2 below shows the funding distribution.

Table 2
*Doctoral Grant/funding Distribution for PhD Research Across Universities**

Support Institution	f	%	University Distribution
No doctoral grant/funding	125	91.3	Ankara, Çanakkale 18 Mart, Çağ, Dokuz Eylül, Gazi, Hacettepe, Yeditepe
TÜBİTAK**	3	2.2	Anadolu, Atatürk, Çukurova
University's grant office	9	6.5	Anadolu (1), Boğaziçi (1), Çukurova (1), METU (1), İstanbul (5)
TOTAL	137	100	

*The grant/funding data are solely based on the information given in the dissertations.

**The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (www.tubitak.gov.tr/en)

It seems that 12 dissertations (8.7%) were supported by an institution or by the university itself. It is evident that doctoral dissertations in ELT are not largely supported by a funding mechanism. Since it is impossible to know the number of submitted doctoral grant proposals and the ratio of accepted and refused grant proposals, an elaboration on the reasons behind limited funding mechanisms would be misleading.

The Subject Areas of the Dissertations

The subject areas were refined by categorizing the dissertations under certain themes in a data-driven process. The "Other" category was used to classify 2 dissertations that did not fit into any of the specific categories. This section also offers the review of 57 dissertations, categorized under major subject areas as the limits of the article allow. The sampling of those dissertations was done among the full-text

dissertations and based on a purposive sampling to include a representative number of dissertations under each subject-area category. The subject areas, or the broad themes, identified for dissertations are given in Table 3.

Major Subject Areas	N	%
Teaching English as a foreign language	76	52
Foreign language teacher education	58	41
Second language acquisition	10	7
TOTAL	144*	100

* The actual number of dissertations is 137. However, 7 dissertations, mostly interdisciplinary in nature, cannot be limited to one major subject area and thus the frequency is presented as 144.

Table 4 below shows the distribution of doctoral dissertations under those subject areas and sub-areas in detail. The overall impression is that the issues investigated in the dissertations are timely and similar with their contemporaries in the international arena (see [Stapleton, 2013](#)). Nevertheless, this does not fully enable us to infer both scholarly and practical impact.

Subject Areas	N*	%	Sub-areas	f**	%
Teaching English as a Foreign Language	90	68	Language skills	21	12
			Language components	8	5
			Curricular studies	14	9
			Testing	3	2
			Learner and teacher variables	29	17
			Document analysis & Language use	14	9
			World Englishes	9	5
			Technology	5	3
			Young learners	5	3
			Learning strategies	4	2
			Intercultural communication	2	1
			Multiple intelligences	2	1
			Other issues	2	1
Foreign Language Teacher Education	42	24	Pre-service teacher education	42	24
			In-service training	2	1
Second Language Acquisition	10	6	Acquisition of morphosyntax	6	3
			Acquisition of lexemes	1	1
			Error analysis	2	1
			Focus on form	1	1
Total	144	100	Total	172	100

* N refers to the number of dissertations with major subject areas. However, since 7 dissertations cannot be limited to one major subject area, the number on this table is presented as 144.

** The frequency refers to the number of the subject areas across dissertations. Some dissertations include more than one subject area.

Teaching English as a foreign language. The subject area “teaching English as a foreign language” includes studies on teaching language skills/components, learner and teacher variables, document analysis, and World Englishes. Thus, the subject distribution shows relatively rich diversity with regards to research topics and concerns. Among 76 dissertations, the most studied issues are “learner and teacher variables” ($f = 29$, 17%) and “teaching language skills” ($f = 21$, 12%). In addition, curricular studies, such as curriculum design and analysis, syllabus design, and program evaluation, are among popular issues ($f = 14$, 8%).

Three dissertations analyzed listening skills over the last five years. Çakmak (2014) explores the impact of multimedia glosses and the strategies employed in listening comprehension and incidental vocabulary learning in a mobile environment. The study concludes that multimedia glosses foster vocabulary recognition and production with no notable impact of the gloss type and that glosses have no effect on listening comprehension (Çakmak, 2014). In a mixed method design, Akdemir (2013) investigates the characteristics of English language learners in terms of the strategies that they employ in listening, discussing the strengths and weaknesses of 10 freshman students of a state university’s ELT program.

Four dissertations focus on English speaking skills in various contexts. Yeganehpour (2014) explores the effects of different ice-breaker activities on speaking production of upper-intermediate level students who took IELTS. Yaman (2014) observes the improvement of speaking skills throughout a project-based learning program, exposing the treatment group to a project-based speaking course in an academic semester and finding that a project-based speaking course is effective in improving the speaking skills of tertiary-level students. Kanık (2010) focuses on the pragmatic competence of native and nonnative English teachers’ abilities to measure apology strategies via a discourse completion test. Kanık (2010) believes that his study may contribute to teacher training programs by aiding language teachers to be a better model for native-like language use.

Reading is the most studied area of the language skills with 7 dissertations. Tosun (2011) investigates the role that the process of developing reading skills plays and interactive models used to facilitate such development under the constructivist paradigm. Bayraktar (2011) explores the role of lexical cohesion in English reading comprehension, finding that not only does awareness on lexical cohesive contribute significantly to reading test scores, but also that recognition of vocabulary alone does not ensure better reading comprehension. Razi (2010) investigates the impact of a training program that he developed on the use of metacognitive reading strategies and overall reading comprehension in a quasi-experimental design. Razi’s (2010) study reveals that the training program improves learners’ reading comprehension skills remarkably.

Of the 6 dissertations on writing skills, 3 focused on writing feedback and the rest assess some tools and programs in teaching writing. [Salteh \(2014\)](#) raises doubts about the usefulness of written feedback given by teachers at the tertiary level and finds that teacher feedback largely addresses local and mechanical errors. [Kavandi \(2012\)](#) investigates the use of web-blogs in developing writing proficiency in English, suggesting online blogs to classroom practitioners. [Babanoğlu \(2012\)](#) studies the exploitation of adverbial connectors in the writings of adult English learners and claims that there exist common interlanguage properties among the learners, some of which stem from L1 transfer.

The dissertations on teaching English language components are heavily based on inquiries about teaching and learning vocabulary. [Çakmak \(2014\)](#) explores the role of multimedia glosses and strategy use in listening comprehension and incidental vocabulary learning in mobile environments. [Köksal \(2012\)](#) evaluates the effects of mnemonic strategies on achievement, attitude, vocabulary learning and retention among 5th grade English learners, reaching promising results concerning the impact of those strategies. [Yılmaz \(2011\)](#) focuses on learning vocabulary via a computer based model in an experimental design and proves its effectiveness. [Ünalı \(2011\)](#) analyzes the lexical differences between the writings of native and nonnative speakers to make use of corpus-based activities to aid learners in overcoming lexicon related drawbacks. [Vural \(2010\)](#) examines the explicit and incidental teaching of verb-noun collocations, underlining the effectiveness of the explicit collocation instruction.

Dissertations on learner and teacher variables address issues of psychological constructs, such as anxiety (f = 2), learner attitudes on language learning (f = 6), motivation (f = 4), learner beliefs (f = 2), learner and teacher autonomy (2), teacher identity (f = 2), learners' perceptions on classroom related variables (f = 5), ethics in learners practice (f = 1), teacher burnout (f = 1), self-efficacy (f = 1), and self-regulation (f = 1). [Önem \(2011\)](#) examines the relationship between test anxiety and achievement level, proposing an instructional approach as a remedy. Similarly, [Aksoy \(2012\)](#) seeks a relationship between anxiety, shyness, strategy, and academic achievement, revealing that shyness and anxiety are correlated positively. The studies measuring learners' attitudes range from relationship between L1 use, foreign language learning and academic achievement ([Kazazoğlu, 2011](#)), and learner attitudes toward native and nonnative teachers ([Skliar, 2014](#)) to the impact of cooperative learning on learner attitudes toward language learning and academic achievement ([Kartal, 2014](#)).

Doctoral studies on document analysis and language use include analyses of research articles (RAs) (f = 4), course books (f = 3), and classroom discourse (f = 2). [Çapar \(2014\)](#) analyzes RAs written by American, English, and Turkish academicians in English and Turkish in order to track the use of interactional metadiscourse markers.

[Duruk \(2014\)](#) looks into the move patterns in the RAs written by Turkish academicians in Turkish and in English. [Ağçam \(2014\)](#) analyzes the doctoral studies written in English by native speakers of English, Spanish, and Turkish to compare the use of epistemic stance devices. [Ördem \(2013\)](#) identifies the differences and similarities among lexical collocations across academic genres. [Özhan \(2012\)](#) focuses on three contrastive connectives (i.e. but, however, and although) in argumentative essays of the American and Turkish university students to investigate them at microstructural and macrostructural levels. [Kurtul \(2011\)](#) analyzes connectives in the texts written in Turkish and English by a group of students. [Söylemez \(2010\)](#) analyzes whether the English course books taught in primary and secondary schools contain examples of sexism. Similarly, [Günay \(2012\)](#) investigates intermediate level English course books taught in Turkey in terms of identity representation. Another course book analysis by [Kıray \(2011\)](#) focuses on writing activities.

Foreign language teacher education. The other subject area, foreign language teacher education (FLTE), is represented by 44 dissertations. The FLTE category is also discussed in terms of pre-service teacher education and in-service teacher education. Table 5 below presents the details of the doctoral studies on FLTE. The studies in the FLTE category consist of “language proficiency of student teachers (STs),” “technology,” and “practicum.”

Table 5

Subject Areas of Pre-service Teacher Education and In-service Training

Subject Areas	N	%	Sub-subject Areas	f	%
Pre-Service Teacher Education	42	93	Language proficiency of student teachers	20	32
			Learner and teacher variables	15	24
			Technology	10	16
			Practicum	4	6
			Testing	3	5
			Curricular studies	2	3
			Other Issues	4	6
In-Service Teacher Education	2	7	Teaching grammar	2	3
			Tracking belief change	1	2
			Technology	1	2
TOTAL	44	100		62	100

The most studied area surprisingly is “language proficiency of the STs” ($f = 20$, 32%), followed by “learner and teacher variables” ($f = 15$, 24%) and technology ($f = 10$, 16%). As a matter of fact, the studies on language proficiency of STs relate to FLTE merely in terms of their context, but not by any critical variables about future teachers, teacher educators, or the context itself. Within dissertations on language proficiency, there are four doctoral studies addressing writing, three of which were written in the same university. [Ekmekçi \(2014\)](#) offers a remedy for writing

problems of STs in a preparatory ELT program through flipped writing classes. Focusing on student teachers in an ELT program, [Dişli \(2012\)](#) investigates whether an online MOODLE system is effective in improving writing and pinpoints certain contributions. [Abbaszad-Tehrani \(2010\)](#) measures the effects of net-folio for writing. Finally, [Yalçın \(2010\)](#) examines the syntactic errors in the essays of ELT (BA) students from different grades.

Four dissertations address speaking skills, and only one study focuses on both speaking and listening. [Zarfsaz \(2014\)](#) explores STs' classroom participation and risk taking behaviors with a questionnaire and focus group interviews. Similarly, [Şener \(2014\)](#) argues the willingness of STs to communicate in English both in and outside of the classroom. [Terzi \(2014\)](#) concentrates on the speaking skills of STs regarding their pragmatic competences. Studies on speaking and listening examining the performance of STs are worthy of mention even though research on listening is really scant.

The research studies on reading do not surpass the studies on other skills. [Tuncer \(2012\)](#) explores the self-images of pre-service EFL teachers and argues whether or not speech and thought presentation are effective factors for the comprehension and appreciation of texts. Elsewhere, [Yangın-Ersanlı \(2010\)](#) uses humorous texts to improve the reading comprehension and communicative competence of pre-service EFL teachers. [Bardakçı \(2010\)](#) designs an experimental study in which STs receive training on argumentative essays to learn reasoning fallacies while the others in the study follow the regular syllabus. [Şahan \(2010\)](#) gives strategy training to STs in order to improve reading. Finally, [Bayraktar \(2011\)](#) examines the place of the lexical cohesive links in reading comprehension.

One sub-area attracting PhDs' attention is "language components," which manifest as vocabulary and pronunciation in the dissertations surveyed. Among four dissertations, only one does not combine vocabulary learning with technology. [Uzun \(2014\)](#) measures the effects of two methods, i.e. conventional "doing exercises" and "preparing exercises," for students' abilities to learn and recall more vocabulary knowledge. [Ağca \(2012\)](#) integrates mobile phones into language learning to facilitate vocabulary learning. Combining a virtual environment and vocabulary learning, [Çekiç \(2011\)](#) aims at finding the most effective method for incidental learning. Under the "language components" theme, two dissertations investigate the pronunciation of nonnative English teachers.

Motivation, anxiety, identity, burnout, and autonomy are classified under the "learner and teacher variables" sub-area. [Gülden \(2013\)](#) addresses teacher cognition, including such core concepts as teacher knowledge, thinking, and beliefs in and attempt to understand the reasons behind instructional decisions. [Cesur \(2012\)](#) examines the competencies of Turkish pre-service EFL teachers using various data

collection tools. [Merç \(2010\)](#) investigates STs' anxiety levels and the causes of anxiety during their practicum. [Subaşı \(2010\)](#) develops a questionnaire to investigate the reasons behind STs' will to become English teachers. [Ercan-Demirel \(2014\)](#) investigates the self-efficacy beliefs of pre-service teachers, and the burnout levels of in-service teachers. Similarly, investigating the Iranian and Turkish EFL teachers' burnout in a cross cultural study, [Khezerlou \(2012\)](#) finds that the teachers of both countries differ in terms of perceiving the stressors of burnout.

Second language acquisition. Dissertations on second language acquisition and ELT are the lowest in number ($f = 10$). Acquisition of morphosyntax studies comprise the majority ($f = 6$) whereas focus on form and acquisition of lexemes studies constitute the minority. Thus the limited number of studies does not show variety in subject area or in research concerns.

[Çele \(2010\)](#) studies the processing of wh- dependencies of Turkish and Spanish speakers with native speakers of English, investigating the role of L1 and working memory capacity. [Çokal \(2012\)](#) compares the online and offline processing of the words “this, it, and that” of nonnative and native speakers of English. [Altunkol \(2011\)](#) seeks not only to understand the role of L1 in the acquisition of causative/inchoative alternations, but also to see the effects of explicit instruction on the acquisition of those alternations. [Özge \(2010\)](#) focuses on Turkish monolingual and Turkish-English bilingual young learners, 5 to 8 years of age, to observe the strategies in the processing and acquisition of relative clauses with a series of experiments. [Toplu \(2011\)](#) associates psycholinguistic and cognitive approaches to analyze the expression of motion events in Turkish, English, and French. [Özişik \(2011\)](#) points out the prepositions mistakes made by Turkish speakers due to their L1 transfer.

As for dissertations on error analysis, [Bıçkı \(2012\)](#) investigates the common mistakes that Turkish adult advanced EFL learners commit in academic writing and pinpoints the problems in a detailed analysis. [Bildircin \(2014\)](#) analyzes the morphosyntactic errors of Turkish adult learners based on a corpus of argumentative essays by 80 English preparatory learners and identifies 17 types of morphosyntactic errors.

Research Designs

Research paradigms in dissertations do not exhibit a rich diversity in terms of epistemological or ontological bases (see Table 6). The positivist paradigm dominates in doctoral research, observed in approximately 85% of dissertations. There are only 7 pure qualitative studies with no evidence of increase in the last five years. Although 71% ($f = 97$) of the dissertations seem to be based on a mixed method design, around 90% of them utilize qualitative data to support quantitative findings or allegedly to increase certain dimensions of validity, reliability, and trustworthiness. We call such use

of data “academic garnishing,” which we offer as a term to label or define qualitative data utilized to support the quantitative data, but not to answer any independent research questions. What is more, only 7 studies provide information about what theory, methods or specific techniques are used to handle qualitative data (E.g: Grounded Theory). As a result, using qualitative data as “quotations from participants” in discussion parts is quite common. Only a handful research develops a theory, a model, or the like based on qualitative data. Interviews, observations, different types of text analyses, syllabi/program evaluations, and analyses as well as diaries, journals, and teacher/learner logs are heavily used in articulation of qualitative design.

Table 6
Research Paradigms of the ELT Dissertations between 2010 and 2014

Research Paradigms	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		TOTAL	
	f	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%
Qualitative	1	3	3	7	1	3	3	21	-	-	7	5
Quantitative	8	24	10	36	8	22	2	14	4	16	32	24
Mixed M.	24	73	16	57	27	75	9	64	21	84	97	71
TOTAL	33	100	29	100	35	100	14	100	25	100	136*	100

* Four among the 27 restricted dissertations are excluded from the research paradigm analysis because their abstracts do not provide adequate information. Thus the total number for this analysis is 136.

Among 129 studies including a quantitative phase, 48 are based on experimental designs. Case study ($f = 14$), survey ($f = 12$), action research (7), and different types of treatments are also used in doctoral research. Piloting is relatively common with 63 dissertations. Fourteen dissertations report triangulation as a method to increase validity, 15 apply exploratory and/or confirmatory factor analysis, and 16 refer to expert views concerning their data collection instruments. Reliability analyses seem to be more popular than validity procedures: 48 studies use Cronbach’s Alpha test, 23 are based on inter-rater reliability, and some 30 dissertations refer to either piloting itself or to triangulation as a method to secure reliability. Around 10% of dissertations based on the positivist paradigm do not have a section for validity and reliability.

Table 7
Research Questions and Hypotheses in Dissertations in terms of Research Paradigm

	Research Questions		Hypotheses		Research Questions & Hypotheses	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Qualitative	6	8	-	-	-	-
Quantitative	24	27	1	20	1	22
Mixed	66	66	4	80	7	78
TOTAL*	96	100	5	100	9	100

*110 dissertations are included in this table because 27 dissertations are restricted from being fully accessed, and the accessible abstracts are not adequate to properly categorize them.

As is given in Table 7 above, the number of dissertations using “hypotheses” and “hypotheses and research questions” is 14 out of 110 dissertations, and a total of 96

dissertations are motivated to answer research questions. In addition, 9 dissertations, mostly adopting a mixed method approach, offer both research questions and hypotheses. Even though both qualitative and quantitative studies can address research questions, it is important to note the dominance of research questions among dissertations that are heavily based on positivism.

Contexts and Sampling

Table 8 below shows the distribution of the research context of the doctoral studies. It is evident that 64% ($f = 90$) of doctoral research between the stated years was done within a tertiary education context, details of which are given in Table 9. The total number of doctoral studies carried out in primary and secondary schools was 31 (22%). Based on our personal experience, the reason behind the interest in a tertiary education context is that it is more feasible for PhDs to collect data from where they are and where they can reach via their own personal and their professors' network. Similarly, 3 dissertations explore ELT in a military context because the authors are affiliated with the army.

Table 8

Research Contexts of the ELT Dissertations between 2010 and 2014

Research Contexts and Scope of the Dissertations	f	%
Early Childhood Education	1	1
Primary Education	11	8
Lower Secondary Education	11	8
Upper Secondary Education	9	6
Tertiary Education	90	64
Military Education	3	2
In-service Contexts	10	7
Adult Private Language Schools	3	2
Others (Adults)	1	1
TOTAL	139*	100%

* The total number of the dissertations is 137. Seven dissertations were excluded from this classification as they investigated genre and/or text analysis, curriculum and syllabus analyses. In addition, 8 dissertations possessed more than one context.

The distribution of research context in the tertiary level ranges from undergraduate ELT programs (52%) to English preparatory programs of the universities (26%). In addition, 13 dissertations investigated various aspects of ELT in private English courses, which is quite important as such courses focus on teaching adult learners. As mentioned above, the research carried out in ELT programs does not necessarily analyze variables of pre-service teacher education. Instead, approximately 35% of doctoral research on FLTE actually focuses on the language proficiency of ELT student teachers. This is not easy to discuss, as [Alptekin and Tatar \(2011\)](#) note "..., a teacher education program is essentially assessed in terms of the English proficiency of its graduates, for which (ironically) it is not responsible" (p. 339). This overwhelming, perhaps ironical, interest in English proficiency of student teachers requires further investigation.

Table 9
Sub-contexts of Studies Conducted in a Tertiary Education Context

Contexts within tertiary education	f	%
English language teaching programs	52	55
Tertiary level English preparatory programs	26	28
Private English courses	13	14
Graduate schools	3	3
TOTAL	94	100

The fact that a great many of the Turkish doctoral research on ELT is carried out in tertiary programs may be associated with how PhDs make sampling and participant choices (see Table 10). For instance, convenience and purposive sampling was adopted in 73 (52%) dissertations. While 22 dissertations claimed to use random sampling, it was observed that 16 of them had actually utilized a random sampling technique. The remaining 6 dissertations seemed to choose classrooms as control and treatment groups for their experimental study. In addition, 14 dissertations were found not to have reported on their sampling procedures. The least chosen sampling methods in doctoral research were stratified ($f = 5$), cluster ($f = 2$), and quota sampling ($f = 1$).

Table 10
Sampling Methods of the ELT Dissertations Published between 2010 and 2014

Sampling Methods	Qualitative		Quantitative		Mixed		TOTAL	
	f	%	f	%	F	%	f	%
Convenience Sampling	4	50	12	35	20	27	36	26
Purposive Sampling	2	25	5	15	30	39	37	26
Random Sampling	-	-	7	21	15	25	22	16
Stratified Sampling	1	13	2	6	4	4	7	5
Cluster Sampling	-	-	-	-	3	3	3	2
Quota Sampling	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1
No information	-	-	3	9	11	11	14	10
Not accessible	1	13	5	15	15	15	21	15
TOTAL	8	100	34	100	99	100	141	100

* Among 137 dissertations, 8 possessed more than one sampling method, and 4 were either restricted or not comprehensible to categorize.

Discussions and Conclusion

The present study offers a detailed analysis of the 137 doctoral dissertations written on ELT in Turkish universities between 2010 and 2014. The scope of the research is limited to the subject areas of the dissertations, the research paradigms, and methodology exploited in data collection and analysis, the context of doctoral research as well as critical issues on research design, such as validity and reliability procedures, pilot studies, and concerns of the doctoral candidates with regards to research topics. In order to clarify the contextual factors that shape the doctoral studies on English language teaching in Turkey, major characteristics of the doctoral programs concerning the availability of the grant and funding mechanisms for doctoral research, the rate and distribution of the international students, the employment status of the doctoral students were analyzed.

The findings on the general characteristics of the doctoral programs revealed that only 12 doctoral research studies (8.7%) were supported by either an external or internal grant mechanism in 8 different universities. In addition, while the gender distribution of the doctoral students was found to be fairly balanced, internationalization in student profiles was not pervasive among the programs, as 92% ($f = 128$) of the students were Turkish citizens. Another critical issue about the doctoral programs is that 13 of the dissertations were supervised by academicians of various programs educational sciences that do not offer any ELT courses at the graduate level, nor are they accredited to supervise dissertations on English language teaching (see Table 1). We believe that this problem should be discussed among doctoral ELT programs, and then negotiated by the Council of Higher Education to take necessary precautions.

The subject areas of the dissertations were found to be in line with the current concerns and issues of applied linguistics in general (see [Schmitt, 2013](#); [Stapleton, 2013](#)). Teaching English as a foreign language was found to be the most investigated area with 90 dissertations on various topics, such as teaching language skills and components ($f = 29$), learner and teacher variables ($f = 29$), document analysis and language use ($f = 14$), and curricular studies ($f = 14$). Surprisingly, the results indicated a burgeoning interest in analyzing the English language proficiency of student teachers in ELT programs, totaling 20 of 44 dissertations. This interest in student teachers' English proficiency requires a further set of investigations, as developing student teachers' English proficiency is not a curricular priority of ELT programs. It was also found that very few dissertations focus on young learners of English ($f = 5$), testing and assessment ($f = 3$), intercultural communication ($f = 2$), in-service teacher education ($f = 2$), and analyzing learner errors ($f = 1$).

Furthermore, the findings revealed that quantitative research designs were dominant. Among 137 doctoral dissertations, 32 offer pure quantitative research designs and 96 are based on mixed method designs. However, the studies using mixed method research designs tend to address their major research questions by referring mostly to the quantitative data. Seven dissertations are based on a pure qualitative design, and among all of the dissertations, only 7 of them explain clearly how the qualitative data were analyzed in methods sections (E.g. Grounded Theory, Content Analysis, etc). Instead, using qualitative data as 'quotations from participants' in the discussion section was found to be quite common. In addition, few doctoral studies developed a theory, a model, or the like based on qualitative data. Interviews, observations based on a rubric, different types of text analyses, syllabi/program evaluations, and analyses as well as diaries, journals and teacher/learner logs were heavily used in the articulation of qualitative design. In this respect, the richness of the qualitative tools and instruments was found to be quite satisfying. As [Belcher and Hirvela \(2005\)](#) point out, nonnative graduate students generally avoid exploiting qualitative methodologies due to the challenge of

building up a text based on a personalized way of writing and expression. Nonetheless, programs can possibly offer more courses on qualitative approaches and methodologies in which specifically data analysis techniques are presented and practiced by doctoral students. While the quantitative approaches to data collection and analysis were quite popular, around 10% of doctoral dissertations based on the positivist paradigm do not offer any elaborations on how they secured validity and reliability of their procedures and instruments. Therefore, the readership is not clearly informed about the steps needed to be taken in order to secure the internal and external validity and reliability during data collection. Another interesting point is that 24 dissertations using quantitative and 66 using mixed method research designs addressed research questions, 5 dissertations tested hypotheses, and 9 dissertations addressed both research questions and hypotheses.

A critical aspect of the doctoral research is the context of the studies. It was revealed that 64% of the dissertations collected data in a tertiary education setting, 8% from primary, and 14% from secondary education schools. Further analysis of those dissertations focusing on tertiary education showed that 55% of those studies ($f = 52$) were conducted in English language teaching programs and 28% in English preparatory schools. The sampling techniques used in doctoral research studies may help interpret such an interest in tertiary education settings. Around half of the dissertations reported to have used purposive or convenient sampling (%52, $f = 73$), while 14 of them did not report on the sampling technique used during research. The reason why doctoral students tend to focus on tertiary programs and choose convenient sampling in data collection explained in a previous local study, which claimed that “...Turkish educational researchers mostly directed their research toward the tertiary (undergraduate) level, as this provides an easy to reach sample population and convenient sampling procedures” (Göktaş et al., 2012, p. 458).

The pressures of rapid graduation and international publishing seem to be important agents in shaping doctoral research. Previous studies investigating Turkish academia pinpoint the need for international publishing (Alptekin & Tatar, 2011) and the pressure of scholarly publishing (Uysal, 2014a) among novice and veteran researchers. The present study is in accord with those national findings and certain international studies (Flowerdew, 2015; Truth, 2012). Deduced from the analysis of the data and the discussions among the researchers, the following 12 points are viewed as important problems to be addressed for the future directions of doctoral research on ELT in Turkey. According to our analysis, the first 6 of those problems can be categorized as *systemic* or *macro level problems* that emerge due to the national policies, possibilities and practices of doctoral research in ELT. We consider the last 6 problems as *departmental* or *micro level problems* that are observed, or not observed, in a given PhD program and/or at a specific university. Table 11 shows the details of systemic and departmental problems observed in the zeitgeist of doctoral research in Turkey.

Table 11

Systemic and Departmental Problems in Doctoral Research in Turkey

Systemic Problems (Macro Level)	Departmental Problems (Micro Level)
1. The pressures of rapid graduation and international publishing	1. Too many studies on language proficiency of student teachers in ELT programs
2. Supervisors with no expertise in ELT or in applied linguistics	2. Little interest in the interpretive paradigm and dominance of positivism
3. Non-accredited programs supervising for ELT dissertations	3. Little interest in subject areas like young learners, testing and in-service teacher education
4. Limited funding/grant opportunities for doctoral research	4. Weaknesses in handling of qualitative data and using them for academic garnishing
5. No national policy for deciding on the research foci of dissertations	5. In-campus research design and data collection
6. Few international students from a narrow geographical area	6. Topics chosen without concern of originality in specific dissertations

Most of the problems above might be resolved by taking specific national and departmental actions. For national actions, an implication would be to decide on a long-term research agenda through the negotiation of graduate programs. Although the responsible bodies do not impose any national research policies on the programs, the [Council of Higher Education \(2015\)](#) has as of late embarked on an external quality assurance system, which may yield fruitful results in due course. In addition, the availability of funding mechanisms may help students collect data beyond the campus. For departmental problems, it is evident that a great responsibility lies on the effort and determination of the graduate faculty members, which has been articulated many times in the literature concerned (see [Belcher, 1994](#); [Walser & Trevisan, 2015](#)).

The twelve problems above should not be considered as monolithic labels defining the ELT academia in Turkey because such an approach would have no contribution to our current practice at doctoral level. A rational stance would be to view those problems as part of the natural developmental process of a research community, and as evidence of the transformation of doctoral research in Turkey. Only then can we pinpoint the areas needed to be strengthened as decision-makers and researchers of the field.

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